

MASQUERADE



WINSTON

Swift

BOYER

THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK

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by Erin Clark

Winston Swift Boyer is easy to talk to. He is much more down to earth than his three-name name might suggest. With a name like that and the serenity of many of his photographs you might think he was a kindly, older gentleman roaming the countryside looking for the perfect picture. He chuckles at the thought. "Wyoming gunslinger is a better description," he says. It is true there is an edginess to some of his art that is a far cry from the landscapes he is best known for (more on that later), but there is also a gentleness about the man.

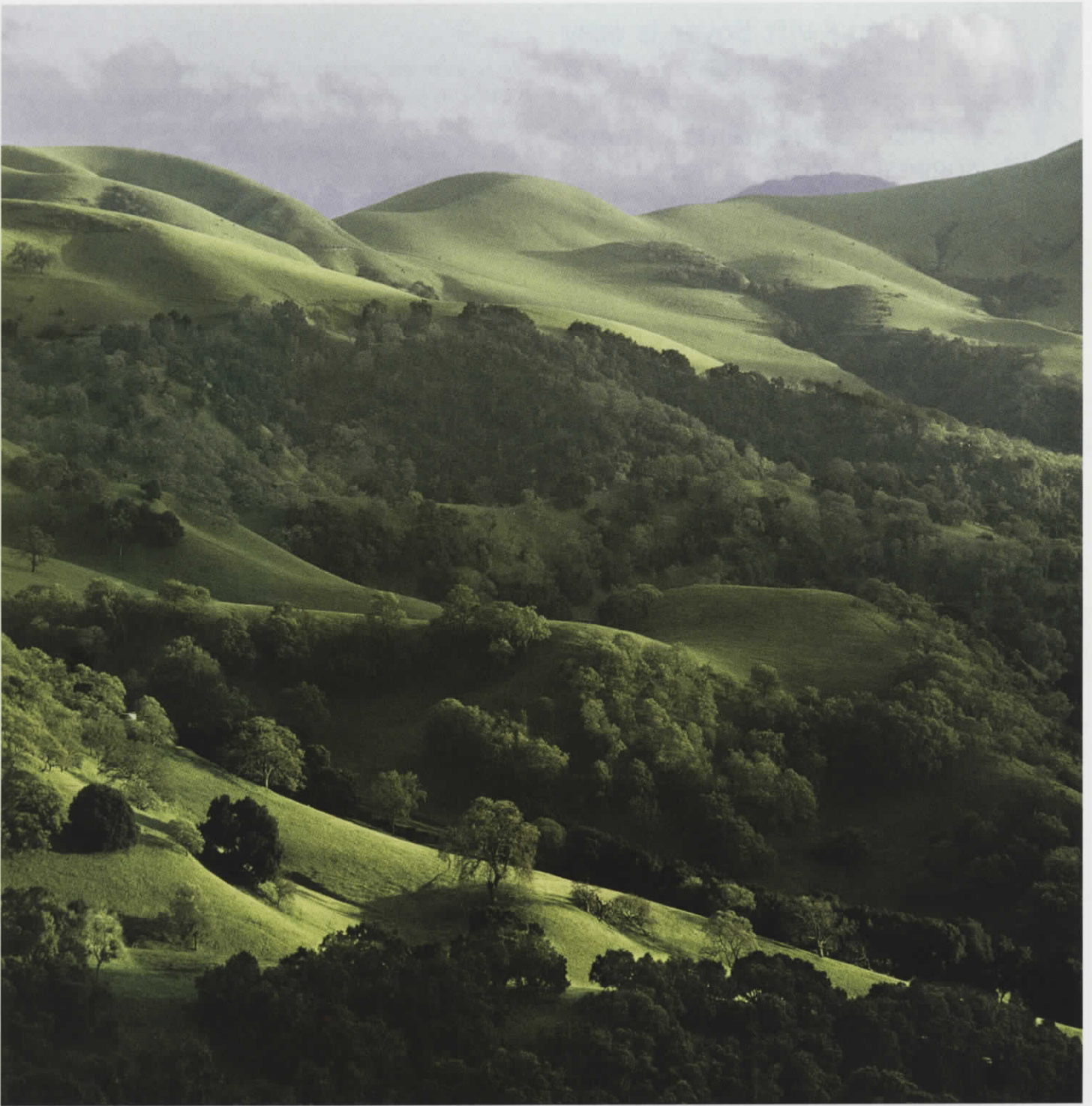
Sitting in his home high atop Garrapata Ridge, overlooking some of the most beautiful coastline in the world (although on this day the fog has settled in like an unwanted house guest), he is a man clearly at home with himself and his art. It is the perfect place for a landscape photographer. Natural beauty surrounds his rustic retreat, offering solitude and inspiration, but it is not necessarily the inspiration you might think of when you contemplate the majesty of the coast. For Winston Swift Boyer, this is home.

Boyer gives the impression that nothing in his life happens quickly. He has the patience of a man who knows all fine things take time to evolve. His first book took three years to complete, and that was after a publisher signed on. He traveled the country looking for the pictures that would tell his story. From the Plantation Road in Louisiana to the old gas pumps in Lane



County, Oregon he found them. *American Roads* is about, well, roads, but it's also a visual account of where we have been and what we might lose if we don't take the time to notice. Boyer likes that about photography. Although a photograph captures one moment in time, he says it can say so much more.

Boyer was born in Montana. A slow migration west eventually brought the family to Carmel, but not before a brief stint in Moeb, Utah, where his father mined for uranium, clearly a profession with some risks. Boyer laughs when he calls it an early form of chemotherapy. The good news is his father went on to live a long productive life, well into his eighties. But for Boyer's mother, also an artist, the decision to move on to Carmel was a fairly easy one to make. Growing up, Boyer says art was a way of life. His mother is a sculptor and she made sure the kids had an appreciation for art of all kinds. Boyer says photography came naturally. He had a camera in his hands by the age of seven and a dark room in the bathroom by the time he was 12.



"San Benancio" Winston Swift Boyer ©2004



WINSTON SWIFT BOYER

Like many artists, Boyer's personal decision to move from hobby to profession came with experience and opportunity. He moved to Los Angeles to try his hand at filmmaking, but decided he was "singularly artistic," meaning he wanted creative control. It was his brother who indirectly provided the next stepping stone. He was the first American to ride in the Tour De France. Traveling and training in Europe, he convinced Winston to come along for the ride. For three years, Boyer made money on sports photography, but he also compiled what he calls an impressive collection of European landscapes and architectural images. "The Medieval Bakery" is a perfect example of Boyer's European collection; angles, lines and light capturing a simple and beautiful scene. He says that's what he likes best about landscape photography. He says beauty in art is not always encouraged or celebrated, except in landscape photography. He says, "to capture the beauty is part of the magic." He did that all over Europe and when he returned home three years later, he was ready to make his next move. He was ready to make photography his life work.

Shown Above: "Medieval Bakery"





THE MASK SERIES

The mask series is not new, in fact Boyer has been working on it for decades now. Phase one of the mask series was Boyer's first New York show back in 1982, but it has continued to evolve since then. He had 12 images for that first show. Today, he has more than 40. He says he doesn't have a favorite. "Too hard," he says, "for me, they are like my children. I love them all." That may be true, but he does admit to a few duds along the way. "Yeah, there were a few ideas that just didn't pan out. So I have done some editing along the way." It

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started with two turn of the century pantomime masks picked up at a Manhattan garage sale for twenty bucks. They actually belong to Boyer's cousin, but Boyer has had them for so long he has to pay rent (usually a photograph or two staves off legal action). From the moment he saw them, Boyer made an emotional connection. He was working on still life photography at the time. He says still life is a good balance with his landscape work because it gives him a measure of control that he doesn't have when working with Mother Nature. He says with landscapes the magic happens in front of him, but with still life, he creates the magic himself.

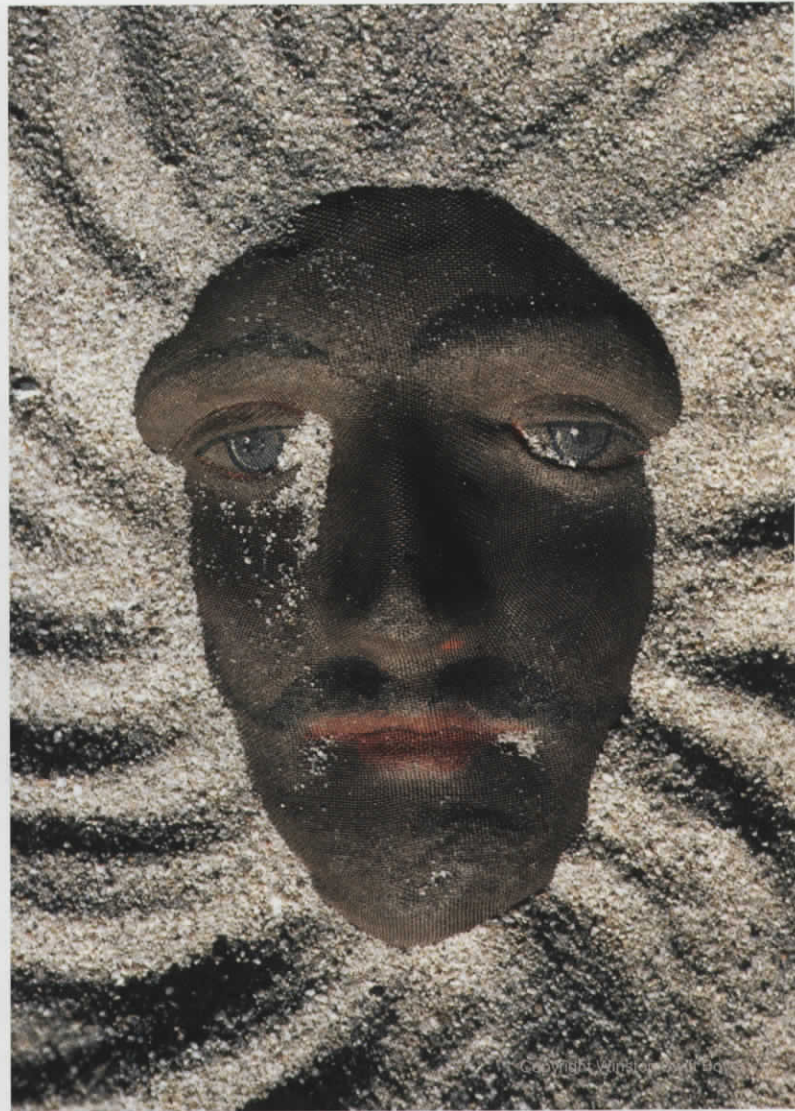


Shown on left: "The Kiss", this page "Sunflower Mask"

WINSTON SWIFT BOYER



MASK & SHADOW ©2004
WINSTON SWIFT BOYER



SANDMAN ©2004
WINSTON SWIFT BOYER

The masks became his vehicle for a unique still life series. For his mask photographs, he simply fills the masks with unexpected things, such as sand or a sunflower, or he arranges them together to give the viewer something intriguing and often striking. Guys, if you want to make a splash on Valentine's Day, Boyer's "The Kiss" is oh, so romantic without the hallmark mush. Boyer hopes to one day put together a book featuring the mask series, but like the photographs themselves, he wants the book to be different. So like most things in Boyer's life, this project will take time to develop.



THE WHITE HORSE ©2004
WINSTON SWIFT BOYER

Boyer has seen the art of photography change over the years. Gone are the darkrooms where photographers would spend great chunks of time. Digital photography has revolutionized the art form. Out of the dark and into the light, many artists, like Boyer, have embraced the changes. He says the new digital cameras are just as good—maybe even better than the old stand by—and the processing and printing is so much easier.

He does, however, acknowledge that the digital era has spawned new issues. For instance, it is easy to alter photographs with digital technology. Boyer calls himself a straight shooter, meaning what you see is reality. The problem is that in the age of digital technology there is sometimes doubt about what is real and what is not. Take the photograph "The White Horse." Boyer remembers the day he took it. A storm had just passed. The dark clouds still crowded the horizon, but on the road stood a solitary white horse. Boyer couldn't have planned it more perfectly, and Boyer says that's just the point. He says, as a landscape photographer, he strives to capture and preserve those perfect moments. In the age of digital photography, though, it's easy to add the white horse after the fact. Boyer feels so strongly about the issue he has even issued an artist's statement. It reads, "In the digital format one can add things that were not there. I feel this takes away from the original magic of why I shot the photograph....I want the viewer to know that there is nothing that has been added. I want the viewer to know this so they are free to enjoy the image as captured reality."



These days, Boyer's captured reality is found in San Francisco. He has started a new series of cityscapes that are far removed from the often shot sunset view of the Golden Gate. He says he shies away from the obvious and concentrates on the grittier side of city life. He likes the severity of the landscape. He likens San Francisco to a collage with many layers, and he hopes his photographs will capture that complexity. So far he has 21 strong images and he's working on more. It's not an exact science. When he can, he gets up to the city and starts moving. With no destination in mind, he roams the streets looking for the images that will convey that mood and character that he believes is the soul of the city. He calls the series *Vertigo*. The title is no accident. Boyer admires Alfred Hitchcock and says he can only hope to achieve some of the feel that Hitchcock brought us in his film version of *Vertigo*.

As Boyer sits at his dining room table contemplating the fog that has formed a comfortable cocoon around his mountaintop home, he admits he has a new appreciation for the place he calls home. He used to call the rugged stretch of Highway One coast-

line, from Carmel to Big Sur, some of the most over-photographed scenery on the planet. He didn't see any point in adding to the mix, but is beginning to change his views on that. Yes, he is working on the *Vertigo* series, and the mask photographs are an ongoing love affair, but he has also recently started a coastal series.

He now admits that for a landscape photographer there is a lot of material to work with along our spectacular coastline, enough for amateur and professional alike. Boyer says, for him, beautiful landscape photography is the place he feels most comfortable. As an artist he says he still had to get out there and try new things, but at the end of the day he still comes back to landscape photography. He says it's all about making something that could be a cliché beautiful and fresh. What better place to do that than the Central Coast?

Taking a sip of some very strong coffee, he sighs and says, almost to himself, "It's a good job, if you can get it."